

## **ABSTRACT**

**RESEARCH PAPER:** Gender Differences in German Compliment Exchanges

**STUDENT:** Katharina Pabst

**DEGREE:** Master of Arts

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From conversation analysis to discourse completion tasks and role plays, researchers have used a variety of methods to collect data on German compliments. However, most of these studies provide an insight into what the people think they say rather than what they actually say or resort to sample sizes that are too small to draw generalizable conclusions.

In analogy to the countless studies on compliment behavior in American (e.g. Herbert 1990; Wolfson 1983) and New Zealand English (Holmes 1988), this study examined 400 German compliment exchanges gathered through field observation on and around a university campus. These exchanges were analyzed for prevalent syntactic patterns, topics, and response strategies with particular attention to gender differences.

Results indicated that female compliments are more formulaic in nature and less likely to be accepted than compliments given by men. Building on Herbert (1990), I argue that German males and females tend to conceptualize complimenting differently: Among females, compliments are frequently used to establish solidarity. The preferred response to this kind of compliment is a mitigating or deflecting response, which serves as a counter-offer of solidarity. Among males and in opposite-sex interactions, compliments tend to be seen as more literal offers of praise, which often elicit *Acceptance* responses that acknowledge the interlocutor's goodwill.